

# CAIRNGORMS DEER ADVISORY GROUP

## DRAFT Minutes of the Meeting held at 14:30 on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2009 The Stag Hall, Mar Lodge Estate

### Present

Ewan	Cameron	Association of Cairngorms Community Councils
Alasdair	Colquhoun	Association of Cairngorms Community Councils
John	Bruce	British Deer Society
Dick	Balharry	Access and Recreation
Will	Boyd-Wallis	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Hamish	Trench	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Iain	Hope	Deer Commission for Scotland
Simon	Blackett	East Grampian Deer Management Group
Richard	Wallace	Forestry Commission Scotland
Willie	Lamont	Forestry Commission Scotland
Michael	Hone	Cairngorms Speyside Deer Management Group
Patrick	Thompson	Midwest Association of DMGs & East Loch Ericht DMG
Bruce	Anderson	Scottish Environment LINK
George	MacDonald	Scottish Gamekeepers Association

### 1. Welcome and apologies.

Hamish Trench regretfully informed the group that Phil Ratcliffe, pressed by other commitments, had reluctantly decided to stand down as chair of CDAG. It was agreed that in the interim Hamish would chair the meeting. The process of deciding a new chair was discussed later in the meeting.

Apologies were received from:

Richard Cooke, Phil Ratcliffe, Paul Timms, Sue Walker and Jamie Williamson.

### 2. Minutes and matters arising from meeting of 24/03/08

The minutes were circulated. After four weeks, no comments were received and the minutes were placed on the CNPA website. It was agreed that in future all minutes placed on the web should be referred to as “draft” in case any member missed the opportunity to comment on the draft.

Action points:

All action points from the last meeting had been fulfilled or are ongoing but a number of items required further elaboration:

- Joint working sites – group members are still having trouble accessing web based maps of the joint working sites. Will BW agreed to put together a ‘pack’ including maps and a list of qualifying features for the Special Areas of Conservation / Priority Areas in the National Park. The location of the Joint Working sites (which include SACs, SSSIs and Estate boundaries) are available on the DCS website (Go to [www.dcs.gov.uk](http://www.dcs.gov.uk), click on “Joint working”, then “The programme”). DCS are developing the site so that eventually it should be

possible to zoom in and access clearer information on the boundaries of the JW areas.

- On the subject of highlighting the successes of the Joint Working process the group were reminded that there remain considerable challenges ahead.
- Willie Lamont has received 50 copies of the Venison Working Group DVD available to anyone that wants one.
- A summary of current work contributing the NPP sustainable deer management Outcomes is yet to be distributed by Will BW.
- Willie Lamont to send Will BW the FCS strategic Deer Plan
- CNP Strategic deer framework covered later on the agenda

### **3. Report on the Glen Feshie visit**

Will reported that the CDAG visit to Glen Feshie on 12<sup>th</sup> May, by kind permission of Anders Holch Povlsen & hosted by Thomas MacDonell - had been a great success. Fine weather was conducive to good discussion and allowed for a leisurely stroll through the lower glen and into newly acquired land adjacent to Corarnstilbeg Farm.

Evidence of pine dominated woodland regeneration was very clear, so much so that some commented on the need to reintroduce grazing (perhaps cattle) to break up and thin the newly emerging dense stands of pine. The Estate was urged to consider this with some urgency by one member as this is a critical stage in the redevelopment of the woodland.

Thomas commented that the Estate recognised the potential impacts of under grazing especially in the areas where they would like to retain the open grasslands and not dense woodland. He added that it is very likely that cattle, ponies or other livestock will be used graze specific areas of the glen during the summer months. It is for this reason that the Estate acquired the neighbouring small farm, for potential future wintering requirements.

The tree seedlings remain vulnerable to deer, which are in Thomas's words, "the preferred sculptors of the emerging and building forest". No deer were seen on the visit, but this was to be expected in the area we visited as most of the deer would have been higher up the hill. However this prompted much discussion about the 'return' of deer to the glen. Thomas made it clear that once the trees were fully established and the habitat becomes more able to sustain higher numbers of deer, numbers would be allowed to increase again.

A key element of the discussions was an acknowledgement that deer management on Glen Feshie Estate and indeed throughout the National Park should not be viewed as static – numbers will fluctuate and the control of deer will need to intensify or abate depending on the state of the habitat and deer density.

Glen Feshie Estate has achieved something that at least one group member thought would never be seen in his lifetime. The regeneration of the pine forest in the spectacularly beautiful glen has been a significant achievement. The absence of fencing and the concentrated culling in key areas has demonstrated that the imbalance of the past can be redressed. However, there are still those, who believe the culls have negatively impacted on neighbouring interests, by reducing the numbers of stalkable deer on their Estates.

Average deer density in Glen Feshie Estate has dropped from 40 to 1.2 deer per square kilometre. The socio-economic impacts of the Feshie culls and habitat restoration as

always stimulated a lot of discussion. One neighbouring landowner was initially unhappy about their stalking potential falling from 110 to <50 stags per year, but indicated that earlier cull levels were difficult to maintain and that in hindsight the impact of the Feshie Culls has been overall beneficial to his interests.

Thomas outlined the current approach to marketing stalking on the Estate. He referred to the “Glen Feshie experience” as being one in which the stalking experience directly contributes to the conservation effort to maintain a healthy habitat.

Glen Feshie Estate have recently commissioned a piece of work mapping ‘woodland potential’ over the Estate. This is being developed into an Estate Long Term Forest Plan. It was noted that a scoping meeting is being held on this on 23<sup>rd</sup> June and a seminar on the future of Glen Feshie Estate later in the year.

Will BW agreed to write to Thomas thanking him for the visit.

#### **4. Scotland’s Wild Deer a National Approach - Action Plan**

Will BW informed the group that “Scotland’s Wild Deer, A National Approach” now referred to as WDNA has been developed into an Action Plan. The plan is divided into 7 different themes:

1. Effective mechanisms for delivering sustainable deer management
2. Wild deer welfare
3. Sustainable economic development
4. Environmental quality and biodiversity
5. Climate change and research
6. Social well-being
7. Raising awareness

CNPA is listed as a lead body for delivering four of the actions (listed below). However it was agreed that there are many actions of relevance to CDAG and to the development of a strategic framework for deer in the CNP. DCS and CNPA are by no means intending to pursue these actions in isolation and will be heavily reliant upon the support of CDAG and other partners.

WDNA actions for which CNPA is listed as a lead body:

- Develop a deer management framework for the Cairngorms National Park
- Promote wildlife tourism opportunities based on wild deer in the Cairngorms National Park by developing links between estates and tourism operators
- Promote venison in the Cairngorms National Park Food and Drink Action Plan
- Embed the delivery of schools events into the work of ranger services and wider education work within the Cairngorms National Park (in partnership with DCS)

There was some discussion about the need for a definition for ‘sustainable deer management’. This has been discussed at length elsewhere; reference was made to the definition in the WDNA and to the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs Strategic Deer Management Plan:

WDNA:

*The conservation, control and use of all species of deer so as to contribute to:*

- *A high quality, robust and adaptable environment.*
- *Sustainable economic development*
- *Social well-being*

## LLT Strategic DMP:

*To maintain native populations of deer at levels which will maintain and restore biodiversity and range condition, and permit the sustainable delivery of all land-use objectives, including conservation, traditional sporting deer-stalking, farming, forestry, and tourism as important socio-economic activities within the National Park.*

The target for 25% of Scotland to be covered in woodland by 2050 (Scottish forestry Strategy) provoked some debate. It was noted that this means 25% across the whole country and not necessarily a target for the CNP where forest cover currently stands at around 20%. There are aspirations through the Cairngorms Forest and Woodlands Framework to develop forest habitat networks, without significant detriment to other land use interests. It was fully recognised within CDAG that there are different objectives/solutions for different areas/estates within the CNP and that the regeneration of woodlands will be of varying importance across the Park.

## 5. Deer Framework

Will BW introduced this topic by referring to the paper which asked some fundamental questions about audiences, presentation, weight and how we take account of the WDNA. It has already been agreed that the framework should set out strategic principles for deer management across the CNP. It should address not just deer management, but all of the National Park Plan outcomes related to Deer.

It was further agreed that:

- the process of inclusively developing the framework is as important as the end product
- for the end product to be of value it is imperative that all of CDAG can sign up to it
- a framework that carries some influence (weight) will be more worth spending time on
- we should initially “aim high” i.e. aim for a document that challenges, progresses things and is not all “motherhood and apple pie”
- CDAG’s role as advisory is not changed, but as a collection of people representing a wide range of interests, it carries some significant influence.
- The framework should be incorporated into the next National Park Plan (2012-2017)

Will BW agreed to produce a paper outlining the scope and timing of the framework in more detail before the next meeting.

## 6. Joint Working update.

Iain Hope updated the group indicating that there have been no great changes since March. Some meetings with Estates have taken place to progress challenges e.g. reduced grazing to allow woodland regeneration having possible negative effects on another qualifying feature.

Iain and Will BW agreed to ensure maps of designated sites were easily accessible.

A question was raised about minutes of meetings relating to Joint Working and deer management in the National Park. It was agreed that any relevant papers would be passed on to Will BW who would distribute to CDAG

## 7. CDAG format/arrangements

CDAG currently has a good mix of individuals and organisations represented, but it is always open for suggestions if there are any relevant bodies that are missing. Any suggestions for additional people/organisations are to be sent to Will BW by the end of June

A new chair is now required. It is important that the person selected remains independent with no vested interests in any particular area. It was agreed that nominations/suggestions should be sent to Will BW by the end of June.

Will BW agreed to share suggestions for additional members and a new Chairperson seeking the views of CDAG before the next meeting

## **8. Forthcoming events**

1<sup>st</sup> July 2009 - Drummossie Seminar is likely to be well attended

4<sup>th</sup> September 2009 - Eat Venison Day

26<sup>th</sup> November 2009 - Wildlife tourism day with a focus on deer – Alvie Estate

## **9. AOCB.**

There was a brief discussion on appropriate signage regarding access to the hills during stalking. Simon Blackett passed round an example of a 'longer term' sign for Invercauld Estate approved by the National Access Forum Stalking sub. Further guidance to land managers can be found by going onto the SNH website and searching for "access stalking".

## **10. Date of next meeting.**

It was agreed that the next meeting will take place on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2009. Venue to be confirmed, but possibly the Lecht.

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- 2 WBW A summary of current work contributing the NPP sustainable deer management Outcomes is yet to be distributed by Will BW.
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